



News From: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Statement of U.S. Senator Russ Feingold *On Civil Rights as a Priority for the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress***

**From the Senate Floor**

**January 9, 2003**

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, this month our nation will celebrate what would have been Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 74<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is right and fitting that on the third Monday of every January since 1986, Americans have paused from their work, school, or other activities to honor Dr. King and his legacy. Dr. King gave hope to millions of Americans and was a catalyst for the greatest advancement in civil rights our nation has experienced since the end of the Civil War.

Because of great Americans like Dr. King, separate but equal is no longer the law of the land. Because of the progress we have made in the last fifty years, segregation in public schools has been unlawful. African Americans have the right to vote. And Americans cannot be fired or denied a job based on race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, gender, or age. Our nation has made great strides to protect freedom and equality for all Americans as a result of Dr. King's leadership.

But almost 40 years after Dr. King delivered his historic "I Have a Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, and nearly 35 years after Dr. King was tragically gunned down at a hotel in Memphis, Tennessee, our nation still has a long way to go to finish his work.

As we begin the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, I want to take this moment to urge both my colleagues and the President to make civil rights a priority.

Earlier this week, the Senate welcomed a new Majority Leader, Senator Bill Frist. But the discussions leading up to that should be the beginning, not the end, of a national discussion about the unfinished work of securing civil rights for every American.

Congress and the President can demonstrate their support for freedom and justice by supporting civil rights initiatives that have been ignored for far too long. And they should begin this month, as the new Congress convenes and as the nation celebrates Dr. King's birthday.

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